

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-883-7150-4

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: DhakaPA@state.gov

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



**REMARKS
BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
THE BANGLADESH DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE:
“BRIDGING THE POLICY-ACTION DIVIDE: CHALLENGES AND
PROSPECTS FOR BANGLADESH”
US-BANGLADESH RELATIONS: A 21ST CENTURY PARTNERSHIP
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
PLENARY SESSION
THE FACULTY CLUB
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2013, 1:00 – 2:30 P.M.**

Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States Akramul Qader

Professor Munir Quddus, President, BDI

Richard Cohen, Director, Center for South Asia Studies

Distinguished scholars, Bangladeshi-Americans, students, colleagues and friends

November 19, 2011 ... it was the day of our arrival in Bangladesh to fulfill my secret dream of some day returning to Bangladesh as America's ambassador. My wife Grace and I were so tired ... I was doubly tired as I had been dragging with me a huge, heavy bag, a bag so heavy that I couldn't even lift it ... in that bag was my mandate, my mandate to broaden, deepen, strengthen the bilateral relationship between America and Bangladesh to the benefit of the people of both country. As one of my senior colleagues put it, "the sky is the limit" in building a 21st century partnership between America and Bangladesh.

Such was not always the case. When last I lived in Bangladesh 1998-June 2001, Bangladesh was a country that people like me loved, but – to put it gently – Washington's focus was elsewhere. By September 12, 2001, however, everything changed, and Bangladesh became and remains to this day a country of deep strategic interest to America. Let me explain.

Bangladesh, the world's seventh largest country and home to the world's fourth largest Muslim population, is a tolerant, moderate, secular, democratic alternative to violent extremism in this troubled region of the world. Bangladesh matters to America in countering terrorism and violent extremism.

As Bangladesh deepens its ties with its neighbors – India, Nepal, China, Burma – it brings greater stability to this region. Bangladesh matters to America.

Bangladesh is the largest contributor of policemen, policewomen and soldiers to international peacekeeping operations with nearly 11,000 Bangladeshis on duty in nine different operations. Bangladesh matters to America in promoting global peace and security.

With the world's population set to reach nine billion by mid-century, feeding this growing population is a growing challenge. Bangladesh's ability to feed itself is critical to both global food security and its own development. Bangladesh matters to America.

America's other key interests include trade and investment, promoting core values such as democracy and respect for human rights, and helping Bangladeshis prepare for and cope with all-too-frequent natural disaster. Bangladesh truly matters to America.

To advance these interests, my Mission and I work hard to promote a Bangladesh that is peaceful, secure, prosperous, healthy and democratic. I fervently believe that such a Bangladesh is in the best interests of the people of America, of South Asia and, most particularly, of Bangladesh. Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and I agreed last week over dinner that the relationship between America and Bangladesh is as strong, deep and broad as ever.

America is Bangladesh's largest market; America is the largest investor in Bangladesh; an American company is the largest taxpayer in Bangladesh; America is the third largest source of remittances to Bangladesh; America is Bangladesh's second largest bilateral development partner.

Only Bangladesh is a partner in all four of President Obama's signature global initiatives: Global Health, Feed the Future, Global Climate Change, and Engagement with the global Muslim community. Bangladesh is truly a great partner. Working together, America and Bangladesh have already achieved so much to improve the well-being of the people of Bangladesh, which, of course, is in America's interests, too.

- The partnership has helped reduce maternal mortality, placing Bangladesh on track to achieve this Millennium Development Goal.
- The partnership has helped reduce child under-five mortality, again enabling Bangladesh to soon achieve its Millennium Development Goal.

- Thanks to the partnership, Bangladeshis are now better able to have the family size they want, thus helping the government of Bangladesh meet its goal of reducing the fertility rate to replacement levels.
- The partnership is helping Bangladesh achieve food security by enabling farmers to increase food production, by enabling Bangladeshis to develop the means to procure food for the family, and by teaching mothers how to select and prepare varied, nutritious food for the family.
- The partnership helps Bangladesh adapt to the effects of global climate change, which will have a heavy impact on Bangladesh.
- The partnership is heavily engaged in disaster preparedness. Already America in partnership with Bangladesh has built or rebuilt nearly 550 cyclone shelters and is now in the process of building 130 more, including 30 that will serve as Coastal Crisis Management Centers manned by the Bangladesh Coast Guard. With Bangladesh increasingly well prepared to deal with cyclones, floods and tidal surges, the partnership has shifted focus to earthquake preparedness. I am working now to try to help Bangladesh establish a Regional Urban Disaster Management Center.
- The partnership continues to work to strengthen Bangladesh's emerging democratic institutions by increasing the capacity of governance at the upazilla and union parishad levels, by helping parliament bolster its committees so they can provide more effective oversight, by improving investigative journalism, among others.
- The partnership is playing a key role in helping the Bangladesh Police instill a new philosophy of policing, replacing the lathi approach with community-based policing. At any given time, there are three policemen from the Portland Police Department at the Bangladesh Police Academy in Sardah, sharing their experiences in regard to community-based policing.
- Our military-to-military partnership is especially strong and productive. Working together, America and Bangladesh have strengthened Bangladesh's ability to secure its maritime borders from piracy, terrorism, trafficking of people, drugs, and arms ... Bangladesh can now better protect its fish and other resources in the Bay of Bengal. This partnership has helped Bangladesh create a Navy Seals-like capacity, called SWADS, that is most impressive. Thanks to the enhanced capabilities of the Bangladesh Coast Guard and Navy, robberies of ships at anchorage in Chittagong have fallen by nearly 75% and insurance rates have dropped, too. Our engagement with the Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard has included the transfer of dozens of high speed, high performance boats. A few days ago I visited the USCG cutter Jarvis, which will become the largest ship in the Bangladesh Navy by year's end. I also hope to transfer four C-130H's within a

year to help Bangladesh expand its ability to respond to disasters and to support international peacekeeping operations.

There's more: the system of Smiling Sun health clinics the partnership supports, the teaching of English and other basic skills in madrassas, the Sisimpur program for pre-school age children, expanded scholarships so more Bangladeshis can get Master's and PhD degrees in America, our exciting new Edward M. Kennedy Center for Public Service and the Arts developed with the Liberation War Museum right in the heart of Dhaka's university community, and so much more, but I must move on.

America's partnership with Bangladesh yields tremendous, tangible results for the benefit of the people of Bangladesh and the United States.

America's relationship with Bangladesh truly has never been better, and I am deeply proud of this partnership.

But there is more to be done.

There are issues that constrain the relationship, such as labor rights, workplace conditions, treatment of Rohingya refugees, and the future of Grameen Bank.

On labor rights, the Office of the United States Trade Representative is actively reviewing a long-pending petition filed by the AFL-CIO to withdraw Bangladesh's privileges under the Generalized System of Preferences. The petition cites deep concerns in regard to workplace safety, the ability of workers to freely associate and organize, and the safety of those who seek to organize workers.

As I've conveyed to the Bangladesh government, owners and labor, Bangladesh must undertake actions to address the concerns raised in the petition, such as ensuring workplace safety, registration of legitimate unions, and safeguards of those endeavoring to help unions organize. If there is no credible evidence of Bangladesh's engaging to resolve these concerns, then the petition may well result in the suspension of some or all of Bangladesh's GSP privileges, which would send a powerful, negative message to RMG and other buyers in America and around the world.

Another important step is establishing an ILO Better Work program here that will not only help Bangladesh improve and safeguard its brand but, as it has in other countries, help foster a constructive dynamic among owners, government and workers to deal with critical issues such as productivity, workplace safety, education and infrastructure needed to diversify and grow Bangladesh's export oriented economy.

This includes amendments to the existing labor law and ensuring fair, transparent and timely registration of legitimate unions.

Resolving these irritants will directly contribute to the further growth of our partnership, so we can explore adding even richer elements to the relationship such as interactions at the highest levels and the Millennium Challenge Account, and to Bangladesh's realizing its potential as the next Asian tiger.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on the success of 2012. Last year was a great year for the partnership between America and Bangladesh. The highlight for me was fulfilling my dream of having Secretary Clinton visit so she could see for herself the fruits of our partnership with Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, the Secretary fulfilled another of my dreams when she and Foreign Minister Dipu Moni signed an agreement to establish a partnership dialogue, thus institutionalizing the relationship. The first session of this dialogue took place in Washington in September and gave strategic focus and direction to our relationship.

At the same time, people-to-people linkages reached new heights as ever greater numbers of Bangladeshis studied or traveled in the U.S.

2013 is a critical one for Bangladesh. This year will be key to whether Bangladesh becomes the next Asian Tiger of my vision, the Royal Bengal Tiger. I hope the political parties engage early and constructively to find an agreed way forward to hold free, fair, credible elections.

Bangladesh must be/will be a democracy. The question is when, not whether, the parties will reach agreement on a way forward to free, fair credible elections. I hope this agreement will come soon so investment dollars flooding out of China and elsewhere will come to Bangladesh, thus helping to realize another of my dreams, a vision of a Middle-Income Bangladesh, Sonar Bangla where all Bangladeshis have the means to provide their families safe housing, ample, nutritious food, quality education, and good healthcare.

I envision a Bangladesh where stunting of children is eliminated; currently 41% of Bangladeshi children are stunted, effecting both their physical and mental development.

I envision a Bangladesh that is the world's largest exporter of RMG and household textiles, replacing China, a Bangladesh that is a major global player in exporting footwear, finished leather goods, frozen fish and shrimp, generic pharmaceuticals, small and medium freighters and tugboats, IT, bone china, flowers, jute, silk and the list goes on and on.

I envision a Bangladesh where the agricultural revolution continues and the nation becomes truly food secure. I envision a Bangladesh that launches an education revolution that creates a highly educated and skilled work force so Bangladesh's migratory labor force is skilled and semi-skilled not just unskilled as is the current situation.

I envision a Bangladesh that takes fullest advantage of its location at the nexus of the New Silk Road and the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor. Truly, I envision the Royal Bengal Tiger proudly and powerfully strutting across the global economic stage, a Bangladesh that is an economic power commensurate with its size.

Of course, the constraints are real, and each of us knows them well: inadequate ports, roads, railroads, and energy and power supplies, corruption, rule of law shortcomings, and the threat of political instability. These challenges are serious, but each is resolvable.

I would like to add a few words about what you, members of the Bangladesh diaspora and others who love Bangladesh, can do and are doing to realize the promise of this relationship.

Bangladeshis are extraordinary people, truly exceptional people. I know of no other people on this earth who are as energetic, dynamic, creative, generous and resilient as are the people of Bangladesh. Everywhere I go, I find Bangladeshis brimming with optimism as they work so hard to build the New Bangladesh, the Middle-Income Bangladesh, the Sonar Bangla.

I think the interests of America are well served by building bridges and ties with the Bangladeshis, which is my goal as I undertake to visit all 64 districts of the nation. Last week, we hosted a large delegation from the American Chamber of Commerce of India, and they, too, came to build connections with their Bangladeshi counterparts.

And just a few weeks ago we welcomed a Congressional Delegation – the largest in anyone’s memory – to Bangladesh. They met the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, visited a garment factory. They discussed all the issues that matter to the American people in Bangladesh – labor rights, security, health. America is indeed discovering Bangladesh as amply attested by the steady stream of visitors from four star admirals and Cabinet secretaries to high school exchange students and Fulbrighters and everyone in between.

As I look ahead to the coming decades, I see ever strengthening, ever deepening, ever broadening relations between America and Bangladesh as people-to-people links, commercial links, government-to-government links, military-to-military links all grow and prosper, constructing a robust relationship built on shared values and aspirations. Of course, there will be no shortage of challenges and obstacles along the way, but I am convinced the trajectory of our bilateral relationship will remain most positive, thus serving well the interests of the Bangladeshi and American people. Thank you.

=====

**As prepared for delivery*